

24th Annual Vermont Kindergarten Conference

Friday, March 25, 2016
Hilton Hotel, Burlington, VT

Open the Door to Learning: Educating Children Outdoors

Featuring Susan Koch, 2016 Teacher of the Year

"Wonder is the beginning of wisdom." – Socrates

8:00 - REGISTRATION & CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST

8:45 – WELCOME

9:00 – Keynote Address



Educating Children Outdoors (ECO) is a standards-based nature immersion program that works in collaboration with public school teachers and their students. The goal of ECO is to help children develop lasting relationships with the natural world and foster a sense of place and stewardship in our local Vermont communities.

Currently, seven area schools are engaging in ECO on a weekly and biweekly basis to meet Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards by introducing children to the natural community right outside their classroom. Children engage in inquiry-based learning in their local parks, public land, and green spaces as they explore forests or wetlands, participate in sensory explorations, and co-construct knowledge about their environment through guided discovery. Children develop a healthy respect for nature, communities, and each other through these experiences.

In this keynote presentation, Susan Koch, Jillian Zeilenga and Amy Butler explore strategies and techniques for creating outdoor

opportunities that inspire young learners. Through multi-media and anecdotal records, Susan, Jillian and Amy will demonstrate appropriate inquiry prompts, curricular connections, and learning expectations that reflect an enhanced educational experience for children learning outdoors.

Keynote Presenters:

Susan Koch, 2016 Vermont Teacher of the Year, K-1 Teacher, Union School, Montpelier, VT

Jillian Zeilenga, K-1 Teacher, East Montpelier Elementary School, East Montpelier, VT

Amy Butler, Director of Education, North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, VT

10:15 – 10:30 - Break

10:30 – 12:30 – WORKSHOP SESSION I

A. Getting Out and Staying Out: Engaging with Children Outdoors

Are you eager to connect your learners with the natural world? If so, this workshop is for you! Let us show you how Union Elementary and East Montpelier Elementary Schools have incorporated outdoor learning into their kindergarten curriculum. A naturalist from North Branch Nature Center will explain the partnership which supports this program. We will connect the Vermont Early Learning Standards, that include Next Generation Science Standards, to inquiry and outdoor learning. Investigations will be shared along with tips for organizing outdoor adventures and involving parents, support staff, and your entire school. You may never want to go back inside!

Presenters:

Susan Koch, 2016 Vermont Teacher of the Year, K-1 Teacher, Union School, Montpelier, VT

Jillian Zeilenga, K-1 Teacher, East Montpelier Elementary School, East Montpelier, VT

Amy Butler, Director of Education, North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, VT



B: Coding, ROBOTS, and Computational Thinking

Explore how programming can support the development of problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking skills in young children. We will explain why coding is becoming such a big topic in education, share the tools to implement a programming curriculum in your classroom. Come meet Bee-bot, learn why Daisy the Dinosaur is all the rage, and explore how to make your imagination come alive with Scratch Jr. We will explore group activities, robotics for kindergartners, and easy to learn applications for computers or tablets. This is an opportunity for those new to programming to gain comfort and experience with this topic, while also providing time for more experienced educators to add new skills to their coding toolbox.

Presenters:

Erica Bertucci, St. Albans City School

Adam Deyo, Kindergarten Teacher, C.P. Smith Elementary School

C. Forest Days: One Day, Every Week, All Year, Outside!

At the Ottauquechee School in Hartford, Vermont, we take our public school kindergarten classes to the forest one day, every week, all year. We'll share how we got started, the routines that work for us, and a few of our favorite activities. If you are interested in the idea of a Forest Day for your class, we'll give you the confidence and logistics to get started. Our workshop will follow the rhythm of our Forest Day and, of course, we plan to head outside, so dress for the weather!

Presenters:

Eliza Minnucci, Forest Teacher, Ottauquechee School

Meg Teachout, Forest Teacher, Ottauquechee School

Hannah Thomas, Kindergarten Teacher, Ottauquechee School

Erika Wetzell, Kindergarten Teacher, Ottauquechee School

D. Child-Sized Heroes of the Community (Service Learning for our Youngest Citizens)

A pre-school classroom transforms an obsession with superheroes into a rich and rewarding 'Helping Heroes' curriculum. 'What makes a superhero?' and 'How can we be superheroes?' are some of the questions that this urban community preschool followed through their map making, grant writing, wagon toting, trash pick-up system, and costume design. This multi-year project has changed the culture of our preschool and how these citizens are seen in their community. In this workshop we will talk about transforming the interests of a teacher and their classroom into a service learning opportunity for even our youngest citizens. Participants will have the opportunity to engage in small group discussions about service learning projects and connect to the big ideas of sustainability.

Presenters:

Charles Winkleman, Preschool Teacher, Burlington Children's Space

Jed Norris, Early Education Coordinator, Shelburne Farms

E. Building Blocks for Personalized Learning

Building the foundation for students to own their learning starts in kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers from the Bennington Rutland Supervisory Union will share classroom practices that establish the foundation for a K-8 personalized learning system. Teachers will share how to create a system that supports learners setting goals, documenting progress, and sharing their learning with others.

Presenters:

Jackie Wilson, Assistant Superintendent, Bennington Rutland SU

Amber Leslie, Kindergarten Teacher, Manchester Elementary/Middle School

Heidi Underwood, Kindergarten Teacher, Manchester Elementary/Middle School

Hilary French, Kindergarten Teacher, Sunderland Elementary

Elizabeth Warnecke, Kindergarten Teacher, Mettawee Community

F. Gnomes, Fairies and Wee Folk on the Land

Who can dispute the power of a child being out in nature? Come water each other's imaginations with the beauty and magic of our experiences as we share the power of wee folk on the land. Bring your creative juices so each of us will deepen our understanding and go away with ideas to support and nurture the inner lives of children on the land.

Presenter:

Carol McQuillen, Kindergarten & 1st Grade Teacher, Orchard School

12:30-1:30 - LUNCH

1:30—3:30 - WORKSHOP SESSION II

A. Melding Philosophy and Practice in Public Schools: Growing While Holding True to One's Core Early Childhood Beliefs

Join kindergarten teacher, Adam Deyo, and second grade teacher, Christine Hertz, for a conversation about negotiating the challenges and opportunities of being an early childhood teacher in a public elementary school setting. Christine and Adam will invite participants to engage in a dialogue about letting social constructivism, relationships, curiosity, and a strengths-based approach guide our teaching. This session will serve as a positive, collaborative time for teachers to connect and share ideas.

Presenters:

Christine Hertz, Teacher, Shelburne Community School
Adam Deyo, Kindergarten Teacher, C.P. Smith Elementary School

B. Yoga and Children: Teaching Children to Feel Calm in the Busy World of Kindergarten

Welcome to yoga! Please join our group to learn how you can empower children by using yoga and mindfulness in your classroom. Experiences teaching yoga through active participation, data, and videos of children will be shared. Participants will have the opportunity to learn poses and brainstorm how to incorporate these activities into their own classrooms so that yoga becomes part of the daily routine. An added benefit of this workshop is an opportunity for you to consider how to use yoga to make yourself a calmer, happier teacher!

Presenter:

Courtney Bryan, Kindergarten Teacher, JFK Elementary School

C. Mudsuits and Mittens!

Every afternoon after lunch in all kinds of weather, kindergartners in Marlboro head to the nearby forest. This workshop will follow children into the forest to find out what happens on these expeditions. We'll discuss how our program meets the needs of all children, including those with special needs and challenging behaviors. Children have developed in unexpected and wonderful ways! The forest explorations have affected learning inside and out. If you are curious about how this program started two years ago and would like to know more about the pragmatics, this is the workshop for you!

Presenter:

Ellen Martyn, Kindergarten Teacher, Marlboro Elementary

D. Outdoor Learning in an Urban Environment

Participants will have the chance to plan for outdoor learning in an urban environment and get outside to see first-hand what it takes to engineer a successful learning experience. The group will work together to identify a way to highlight the big idea of Interdependence using the natural and human community. Be prepared to go outside regardless of the weather conditions!

Presenters:

Suzanne Clark Weishaar, Sustainability Coach, Sustainability Academy
Jed Norris, Early Education Coordinator, Shelburne Farms

E. Open the Door to Kindergarten Transition: One Community's Experience

This panel discussion will focus on one community's process for examining key components for a successful transition to kindergarten. Panelists will also share work being done in the Bennington Region to build a supportive transition system with the help of Building Bright Futures. Barriers and opportunities will be discussed, as will strategies for designing a system for supporting successful transitions in any region.

Presenters:

Barbara Morris, Pre-K Coordinator, Bennington Co. Head Start, United Counseling Children's Services
Kate Abbott, Ph.D, Director of Early Education Services Pre-School-Kindergarten, Southwest Vermont SU
Robin Stromgren, Regional Coordinator, Building Bright Futures Regional Counsel for Bennington

F. Forest Kindergarten

Learning outdoors provides opportunities for all children to be inspired, engaged, and curious about the natural world. On Fridays, our kindergarten students head outside from 9:30-2:00 pm to learn in their outdoor classroom. The days include listening to stories, gathering weather data, hands-on science investigations, and walks through the forest or fields to observe the environment. There are multiple teachable moments throughout the day which offer on-the-spot questioning, inquiry and excitement for all of the children. Come join us as we share our experience and resources, and invite you to participate in several of our most successful learning activities. We will share a sample schedule along with ideas for you to try, so that you can start right away with your own students!

Presenters:

Sally Hayes, Principal, Brewster-Pierce Memorial School
Brianna Parker, Kindergarten Teacher, Brewster-Pierce Memorial School
Kasie Enman, Coach/Naturalist, Brewster-Pierce Memorial School

3:30 Adjourn

Registration Deadline – March 18, 2016

COSTS: Registration \$120 Full-time Student \$60 (present Student ID)

Link for Registration: <https://creator.zoho.com/allisonkeating/kindergarten-conference-2016#>

Payment: Make checks payable to "VAEYC" and mail to:

Sonja Raymond; VAEYC; 963 Paine Turnpike North; Unit 3, Suite A; Berlin, VT 05602

Purchase Orders made payable to VAEYC can be faxed to: Attn: Shirley at 802-479-1829

Questions? E-mail any questions you have to Shirley at: shirley.rawson@vermont.gov